

COCHISE AND MANOLETE

I'm a first-rate businessman
but a lousy poet. My friends
believe anything I tell them.
The line to my front door
is imaginative. The bell rings
and another word gets written.
Soon I'm admitting anything that
walks. Turn them upside down
and they come back for more. But
the titles are unrepeatable.

-- richard snyder

Ossining NY

THE MAN WHO WANTED THE WORLD TO END WITH A BANG

When this man's relatives come to see him, he gives the grandfathers exploding cigars. He puts smoke bombs in their automobiles. After the goodbyes and waves, the cars go down the street belching black smoke. The relatives drive on grimly, condescension all over their faces. He has been doing this for years.

Lady Fingers to wake his baby up. Cherry bombs to throw at his cat. Rockets and roman candles to illuminate his night. He made a piece of pipe into a pistol and, stuffing it with a two-inch firecracker, shot a marble into the side of his house. It went through all the walls and plaster, through the back of his desk and into the upper right-hand drawer where it rolled around on his papers.

This man argues that explosives have aesthetics. They benefit man in three ways. First they further his education by instructing him in the effect of a sudden alteration in his physical surroundings. Second, explosives make possible grand and stirring celebrations. Third, and greatest in value, is the inexplicable joy conveyed by explosives.

Take the ancient Chinese, for instance. They celebrated by firing off black powder. Marco Polo saw it and dreamed of cannons.

It can be argued that cannons have negative aesthetic because of their destructive capabilities. But many have found experience with a cannon to be quite educative. And they point out that the successful use of large numbers of cannon has never failed to lead to a celebration. Which brings us full-cycle back to the ancient Chinese.

And as for joy, he says, looking his relatives straight in the eyes, it's wherever you find it along the way.

This man moved all his relatives to that part of the country which records the greatest number of sonic booms. This is what it will sound like when the world ends, he said. After a while you won't even notice it.

Sure. Great. Whimpered his relatives.

His father came to visit. He accepted his son's monogrammed, pre-Castro, Cuban cigar. When it went off he shit in his pants. The relatives all smiled wanly. Everyone shits in his pants the first time.

On the explosives aesthetics index an exploding cigar with shit in the pants rates a four. An explosion leading to pure joy (for exploder or explodee) rates a ten if there are two corroborating witnesses.

But this man says getting a ten is almost impossible. Only through involvement in the bang does one experience the most intense explosive joy. And the closer one is to the bang, the less chance of his surviving to reap the educational and celebrative benefits of the experience. One approaches the top and bottom of the aesthetic index at the same time. Such moments are instantaneous, awareness of them is never reached.

The ultimate explosive experience requires that everyone in the world would be involved in the bang at the same time. Like if a giant flaming star, thousands of times larger than the Earth, were to come hurtling out of the heavens and mow us down.

That, he tells his relatives with a wink, is how the world will really end.

IN THE UTILITY CLOSET -- FOR CARL LARSEN

In the loneliness of the utility closet the tousle-headed mop has begun to fantasize a relationship with the plumber's friend.